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ABSTRACT

The goals of education are drawn from what we know about the nature of knowledge, society, and the individual. There is almost universal agreement that education is to give definite knowledge. However, the second objective, to create those mental habits that will enable people to acquire knowledge and form sound judgments for themselves, often meets with considerable resistance. Schools address the cultural, vocational, and personal assumptions that influence educational structure and philosophy through the curriculum. The essential question is this: "What does a young person need to live satisfyingly and creatively in a changing world?" By practicing humanistic education and understanding that teacher expectations influence pupil behavior, schools can help answer this question. (MLF)

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THE SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

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THE SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

The consuming public has long since sought a simple definition for "good" education. The recent national emphasis on accountability is but another reflection on the desire for an answer to the question, "How will we know when our children will have been well educated?" It is difficult for society to accept the simple fact. . . there is no consenus of what education is and what schools should accept as their responsibility. It is clear, however, that the goals for education are drawn from three basic sources; (1) what we know about the nature of knowledge, (2) what we know about the nature of society, and (3) what we know about the nature of the individual. These three basic assumptions which influence educational structure and philosophy seem to change only in terms of emphasis. Curriculum remains the vehicle through which schools address these three; the cultural assumption, the vocational assumption and the personal assumption.

What is a Relevant Curriculum?

A student who enters first grade today, upon completion of twelve years of formal education possibly will have learned about one billionth of that which is worth knowing. I do not presume to know <u>which</u> billionth is the most essential and should therefore be a standard requirement of all students. Perhaps a more practical approach is to validate <u>whatever</u> body of knowledge and information a community can agree upon that promises to meet its needs at

a particular period in its history. Curriculum could be seen as being the seat of a three-legged stool. One leg of the stool could be a consideration of the nature of knowledge, one a consideration of the nature of society and the third a consideration of the nature of the individual.

It is wise to avoid taking the position that one or the other of the three legs is, in fact, "education." Some tend to hold, for example, that education is the teaching of basic facts. Others view education as the process of preparing people to fit into society. Still others contend that the essential role of education is to advance the individual to the fullest extent of his or her potential. Actually, education must do all three.

With more people working to expand and gather knowledge than ever before, and with more emphasis on finding better ways of doing things, the essential question is, "What does a young person need to live satisfyingly and creatively in a changing world?" It appears that all these needs can be met through the basic curriculum which might be found in most schools if certain strategies are employed.

Creating a Humane Learning Environment

The term "humanistic education" has been used with such ambiguity that it brings mixed responses from educators. For me, it is simply a pragmatic approach to dealing, within the regular classroom, with issues and people in a human manner. The method

does not require the reducing of expectations in levels of performance of students nor a deviation from the standard course of studies as it reflects the various fields of inquiry. Rather, it aims at reducing the incompatibility between learner and learning, and at instituting a results-oriented rather than a process-oriented structure in the classroom.

The foundation of a humane classroom is the positive belief the teacher has about the learner. This belief cannot be based purely on an idealistic attitude that all people will do well if they are loved, but rather should be founded upon an understanding of human tendency. The teacher must have knowledge that people are capable of responding to certain stimuli and that certain actions precipitate certain logical consequences. In short, "humanism" does not come from feelings as much as it does from perceptive analysis of human behavior. The teacher must understand the nature of the learner, the science of learning and the worth of knowledge.

Teacher Expectations Influence Pupil Behavior

Research indicates that teacher expectations of pupil achievement determine, to a large extent, what opportunities teachers make available to students to participate in classroom interactions, and how they will achieve. Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) seminal study documents a direct correlation between the two variables of expectation and achievement. If teachers expected students to do well they tended to do well, and if they were expected to do poorly, the students tended to perform poorly. It appears that teachers' expectations influence the way they interact with

students. They tend to spend more time with the superior students, and communicate in a more positive, accepting, supportive manner than with average or low achievers. Teachers also tend to communicate their expectations to students through their classroom behavior. The students, in turn, respond to them in ways confirming these expectations.

Summary

Instruction is an effort to assist or shape the intellectual growth of the learner. Intellectual growth involves an increasing capacity to say to oneself and others, by means of words and symbols, what one has done or what one will do. Learning should be considered to be complete only when the pupil is able to translate experiences into the model world. When this consideration is not addressed by the teacher, children are frequently working on a different set of problems than those the school has set for them. This increases the discontinuity between school and life resulting in lack of succes in either.

The transformation of civilization through the institution of education will continue to be a gradual process. The goal of education will remain that of building a good life for all the nation's citizens. To build the good life, the institutions of education must develop within the individual the qualities of human intelligence, self-control, and sympathy for the less fortunate.

Of one of the two most frequently voiced objectives of education, there is almost universal agreement on the first, that is to give definite knowledge. However the second objective,

to create those mental habits which will enable people to acquire knowledge and form sound judgments for themselves, often meets with considerable resistance. Without the institutional of this second objective, education becomes synonymous with indoctrination. It forces people into rigid molds and leads to the inevitable conclusion that the guardians of education are to <u>think</u>--the rest to <u>obey.</u>